

Guide to

Smart DJ Shopping

by Bob Moffett

Start with a well prepared list. But when it comes to hiring a wedding DJ, what do you include on that list? We put together this handy guide to address some of the real questions & choices you face, and offer some practical advice.



As technician and host, the challenge facing your wedding disc-jockey is to recognize the different moods and special moments during your reception and enhance those moments with his selection of music. Your wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime event charged with emotion, and your DJ will be responsible for making that event entertaining and memorable.

The DJ actually serves as a catalyst to help your guests entertain themselves. To connect with your guests the DJ must watch for details both on and off the dance floor, plan effectively and personally with you, the bride and groom, and most of all listen to your ideas, preferences, questions, and concerns.

Begin by trying to determine exactly what it is you want the DJ to accomplish for you at each stage of the event. DJs vary in their style. Some are focused solely on the music and others are flamboyant entertainers - in between is an extended range of possibilities. Once you've set your goals, expectations, or constraints, you can match the right person to the job.

Choosing Your Disc Jockey

The best way you can choose a disc-jockey is through a referral from a person you trust. If the same name is mentioned by more than one source, so much the better.

You should also ask for a list of references from your prospective DJ. This will give you an opportunity to talk to other couples who hired the same DJ. Ask if the DJ lived up to their expectations and any promises made during the sales and planning process.

Remember that you are looking for a wedding DJ - but someone who also draws from a wide palette of other successful event experiences. In the same way that younger DJs may lack the maturity to deal with wedding formalities, so too can a "wedding specialist" turn out to be stuck in the same tired routine.

Private events are different from other DJ work; and the diversity of today's music means you should carefully consider the style of any particular DJ. Radio and nightclubs cater to their niche so, what you enjoyed on a Friday night out may not work for your wedding guests.

Some DJs may specialize in one type of music, or a particular age range. Your DJ may need a wide range of music, plus the knowledge and experience to use it correctly. Match your DJ to what you know about the people on your guests list for best results.

When you call, ask if the date of your event is available, get a general idea of the cost involved. Promptly make an appointment to meet the disc-jockey.

Your first impression is important. Since the DJ will become a part of your wedding plans, you will want someone you're comfortable with as well as someone willing to accommodate your personal style and taste. Use this interview to evaluate the DJ. Are they approachable, knowledgeable, and experienced with wedding events? What level of commitment do they have to the job? Is there a replacement should they be unable to perform?

Gauging Experience

A professional disc-jockey must be a director, psychologist, motivator, host, and entertainer all at the same time. It is important to select a DJ who is mature, articulate, accommodating, and well educated in reception protocol.

Check that the years of experience are consistent with the DJ's age. More importantly, you should know how many wedding receptions the DJ has performed at to be sure that their experience is relevant.



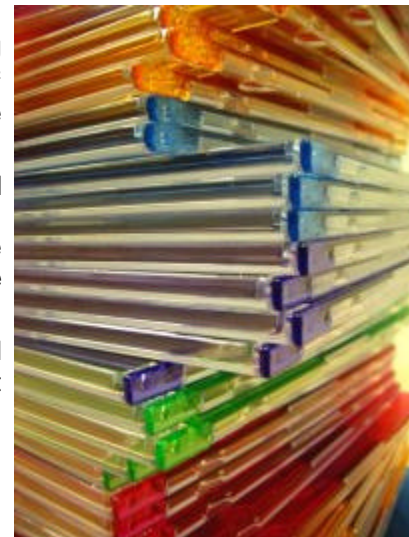
Also, look for other diverse experience they can bring to your event. You want to avoid a DJ who's ability is limited by a single repetitive style. When interviewing the DJ pay attention to their ability to pick up on your ideas and offer interesting and insightful approaches to your questions and ideas.

Reviewing the Music

When the DJ refers to his music collection be sure you understand what selections will actually be on hand at your reception, rather than simply everything the DJ owns. The library should cover a wide range of styles and years with thousands of titles to choose from. Check to see that requests will be honored, and that the pledge is sincere.

Compact disc is the current professional standard, and offers the greatest sound quality with the lowest risk of technical failure. Computer based systems are gaining in popularity, but take extra care to separate the professional DJ from the home computer enthusiast. A fail-safe replacement system is an absolute must to insure against technical problems.

Recordable mediums can be handy but avoid DJs who rely entirely on duplicated materials. Music is a significant tool of the trade and a true professional would not have difficulty obtaining legitimate originals or waste countless hours recording and copying tracks. DJs should be in compliance with US Copyright Law .



Planning is the key

Your DJ should be well aware of the decisions and planning ahead of you. He or she should supply you with an appropriate form on which to note your preferences with regard to introductions, formal dances, and other aspects of your reception. Before the event, hold a planning session with your DJ to discuss all of these arrangements in detail. Be certain that you plan directly with the DJ who will be responsible for your event. Check that there will be an alternate should this person for any reason be unable to perform. Your entertainment choice should be sealed with an appropriate business contract. Review it carefully and ask for help if you do not fully understand what responsibilities are yours, and what will be provided by the DJ.

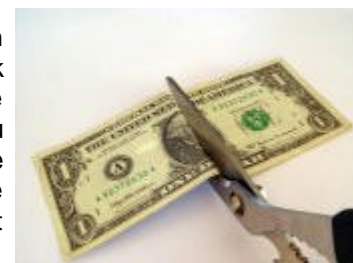
The Sound System

Generally speaking, what is truly important is not the system itself so much as whether there is spare equipment on hand as a backup. Guarantees and refunds will be little consolation should an equipment failure bring your reception to a sudden silent stop. Even the highest quality components are not fault proof, so true professionals will be adequately prepared. Be sure that your DJ is carrying spare equipment to your event for all major parts of his system. Amplifiers and speakers are the most critical component of all systems, so a spare amp and protected speakers are a must have.

In addition, your DJ needs to have an acceptable backup plan for him/herself too! Life happens and your DJ is just one of the living. Determine what procedure is in place to insure that you have suitable entertainment for your event should the selected DJ be unable to perform. Discuss when and how you would be notified of a problem, and who will have final approval over any substitutions made.

The Right Price

Services are available in a wide range of prices. Pricing is also highly subjective and often ill-representative of the DJs ability. It can not be emphasized enough that you must look beyond the sales pitch and the price. You can find excellent choices at nearly every price level, and can be equally disappointed. Avoid being scared into paying more than you have too, but don't pay less than you yourself feel would be appropriate to get the job done right. Saving money is no reward if the DJ is too inexperienced and ill equipped to handle your event. Likewise, spending an unnecessary premium for your DJ is not a magic bullet for party success.



Consider the price quoted in light of the information provided, as well as your own personal sense of the DJs ability to meet your expectations. References should be plentiful; specific to the type of event you are planning; and recent. Remember - you are dealing with relatively small companies and individuals providing personal services. Hire the DJ you can trust to look after your best interests and deliver the results you want.